

**MINUTES OF THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

September 6, 2013

Conference Room A

7:30 a.m.

Members Present: Everett Eaton, Chairman; Christine Dwyer, Jack Thorsen, Dana Levenson, Philip Cohen, Eric Gregg, Ron Zolla, Josh Cyr, Bob Marchewka, John Pratt

Absent: John Bosen, Nancy Carmer

City Staff: City Manager John P. Bohenko, Dave Allen, Juliet Walker, Adam Cannon

Chairman Eaton opened the meeting at 7:38 a.m.

Approval of draft meeting minutes of July 23, 2013

The draft meeting minutes of July 23, 2013 were unanimously approved as written.

Old Business

City Council Action & BOA re: Agreement with Kearsarge Mill Unit Owners Association Re: Parking for Heinemann Company employees

Deputy City Manager Dave Allen gave an update on the Agreement with the Kearsarge Mill Unit Owners Association regarding parking for Heinemann Company employees as part of an expansion of the company. He indicated that the City Council approved an agreement with Heinemann at the August 5th meeting which gave public access to the parking spaces available on nights and weekends. Mr. Allen also noted that Heinemann will need to go to the Board of Adjustment for a minor technical issue and get a variance. City Manager John P. Bohenko stated that the agreement will relieve parking issues in the neighborhood and thanked the Commission and City Council for support.

Wayfinding Project Update/Schedule

Next, Transportation Planner Juliet Walker gave a presentation to update the commission on the wayfinding project. Ms. Walker stated that the City has worked with the consultant Merge to design three options for a wayfinding sign system. She noted that the wayfinding project team received input through an online survey and the team came up with three themes including a historical theme, a working waterfront theme and a maritime theme. The project team decided to mix elements of all three themes for the best effect.

Regarding, specific sign design, Ms. Walker noted that local artists could add some embellishment to make the signs blend better and fit with the overall character of the City. The team is currently working on finalizing the sign system template by looking at pedestrian and motorist signs, identifying priorities, utilizing standard symbols and incorporating area and landmark differences.

Councilor Thorsen asked about whether snow plows would tear up ground medallion signs on streets. Ms. Walker indicated that the project team has considered this and are looking into a hefty material that reduces wear and tear. Councilor Dwyer asked about how many medallions the team is considering. Ms. Walker responded that they are not planning for many medallions, but feel that they would work best in an area where lots of pedestrians are able to see them (i.e. Market Square). She also added that parking signage was the highest priority.

Chairman Eaton asked if there would be any digital signing for parking. Ms. Walker replied that there are plans for digital messaging through visual message boards at the outskirts of the City, to inform people whether the garage is full or other parking information. The team is currently in the process of identifying the best three locations for these items.

Mr. Gregg noted that there was a hodgepodge of signs and asked if those would be removed as new ones are added. Ms. Walker noted that the team was planning on removing and replacing in some areas and removing

signs altogether in others. Mr. Cyr agreed that this process would help remove the clutter of signs. Ms. Walker also stated that the City could get even greater use from signs by using both sides; perhaps for different informational locations and that the team is also looking at mobile friendly wayfinding technologies.

Mr. Dana Levenson inquired about the execution timeline and costs of the project. Ms. Walker replied that the team does not have an estimate yet and that they are in the process of identifying funding sources and would present a plan to the City Council in the fall. She also added that the project would go into the capital plan and be funded out of the Parking and Transportation fund as a phased process. Mr. Levenson asked if the timeline would occur over the next five to seven years. Ms. Walker noted that she would like to see some structures put into place next year. Mr. Bob Marchewka recommended a three year timeline.

Next, Councilor Dwyer indicated that she was not advocating this idea, but noted there was a recommendation to make one-way streets downtown into two-way streets. City Manager Bohenko stated that City staff was not promoting the idea, but that it was identified as a possibility through the Transportation Policy Committee.

Market St. Gateway Improvement Project Update/Schedule

Following this discussion, Ms. Walker gave an update on the Market Street Improvement Project. Ms. Walker stated that there is a staff steering committee that is working with their consultants, RSG, Inc., and Richardson & Associates on the design of improvements. Goals of the design included fashioning the street as the primary gateway into the City, making this gateway more pleasant, and tying the project into wayfinding. She added that there is an opportunity for a public park along Michael Succi Dr. Mr. Zolla stated that the land adjacent to Michael Succi is a huge asset.

Mr. Allen noted that the steering committee will be getting 3-4 options of various bike/sidewalk configurations. City Manager Bohenko stated that these improvements are included in the capital plan and noted that exit 7 was updated by the State of New Hampshire. Mr. Eaton asked if there were any plans for the medians. Councilor Thorsen inquired about ground noise and the special needs of the port. Ms. Walker indicated that as part of the scope, the design team is consulting with abutters and will determine the level of need for noise abatement.

Mr. Phil Cohen noted that the intersection of Market and Deer Streets is pretty challenging. City Manager Bohenko stated that the intersection is complex with the trucks Granite State Minerals entering and exiting. Councilor Dwyer raised the issue of speed. Ms. Walker stated that the plan is not to increase speed.

New Business

NH Manufacturing Week – Portsmouth Business & EDC Role

City Manager Bohenko stated that this topic would be moved to the October 4th meeting.

Mid-Year EDC Action Plan Review

Chairman Eaton stated that the mid-year action plan was designed to be a dynamic document. He noted that it was important to promote development in other areas of the City and think less downtown-centric. The Commission would like to focus on larger employers as well and examine the status of bridges and infrastructure.

As part of this discussion, the Commission examined potential for redevelopment in certain areas of the City. Mr. Gregg stated that there is a lot of activity on Route 1 and asked about the possibility of good pedestrian and bike implementations being made. City Manager Bohenko stated that the DOT's view is that if the City wants it, it has to pay for it and put it in. Councilor Dwyer noted that the Route 1 area has the potential for a TIF and that some parcels are prime redevelopment area. Mr. Cohen sees the Northern Tier as a ripe opportunity for a TIF. Mr. Zolla indicated that the City needed to have the TIF committee back.

Chairman Eaton asked for the Commission to read the plan and to e-mail changes prior to the October 4th EDC meeting.

Other Business

Chairman Eaton stated that it was the busiest summer he could remember in Portsmouth and noted the number of garage closures. He also asked about how the Commission could incorporate larger employers as part of its mission. Mr. John Pratt noted that as someone who goes downtown every day, he sees significant problems with parking and noted that the garage is full and he has to drive around and go elsewhere. He also believes that a lot of people are spending money elsewhere and that he dines in other places. He also added that there is no handicapped parking and that it's not easy for elderly and disabled people to walk around downtown.

Mr. Zolla stated that the EDC was never consulted with the rate changes to parking spots. Councilor Dwyer replied that there was an omnibus and meetings and lots of notification. Mr. Cyr noted that the Commission should be aware of options if groups are contacting businesses and restaurants regarding parking issues.

The meeting adjourned at 8:43 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Adam Cannon